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Letter dated 7 January 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the conclusions of the Chairperson of the meeting of the Arctic Council held in Rovaniemi, Finland, on 11 June 2001.

I would be grateful if you could have this document circulated as a document of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development at its second session, from 28 January to 8 February 2002.

(*Signed*) Marjatta **Rasi**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Preparing for Johannesburg 2002
An initial Arctic message: 10 years of Arctic environmental cooperation

Rovaniemi, Finland, 11 June 2001

Conclusions of the Chairperson

The global dialogue on sustainable development has high relevance for the circumpolar North, the Arctic. The message from the Arctic is unique, due to its virgin nature and specific living conditions. Given the impact of global developments in the Arctic and the significance thereof to mankind, the voice of the Arctic should be heeded at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which is to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002.

The Arctic Council is a high-level intergovernmental forum, with all Arctic countries, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States of America as members, and with the indigenous peoples of the Arctic participating in its work on a permanent basis. The Arctic Council and its specialized working groups build policies based upon the work of Governments, indigenous people, subregional actors, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations and international organizations.

Our commitment to contribute to sustainable development

These conclusions will serve as a springboard for Arctic participation in the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and will be supplemented as the preparatory process unfolds. Regional cooperation is indispensable for the participatory processes and provides building blocks in the global cooperation on sustainable development.

The aim of the sustainable development programme of the Arctic Council is to expand opportunities of future generations in the Arctic, and to promote economic activity that creates wealth and human capital, while simultaneously safeguarding the natural capital of the region. Arctic cooperation contributes to regional and international stability and security in their comprehensive sense. The ways and means of Arctic cooperation might serve as a model for regional cooperative initiatives in other parts of the world, including monitoring, assessment and concrete action.

The European Union, the territory of which extends beyond the Arctic circle, is invited to cooperate closely with its Arctic partners in developing contributions from the Arctic region to the Johannesburg process as it unfolds.

Sustainability in utilization of natural resources

Global market demands and technological progress offer new opportunities for expanded utilization of natural resources in the Arctic. If properly managed, these opportunities can bolster sustainable growth and well-being in the region. Without precautionary measures, however, the traditional livelihood of indigenous and other local people, as well as the existence of vast areas of pristine nature, may be in

danger. Securing sustainability in the use of natural resources, including biological resources, is an important challenge to all Arctic States. Arctic States should assess the environmental, social and economic impacts of any undertakings to exploit resources in the Arctic portions of their territory, taking into account the latest research on the specific circumstances of the Arctic.

The Arctic States will encourage a public and private sector dialogue in the Arctic on environmental practises in the utilization of natural resources in the region. The Arctic Council Environment Impact Assessment guidelines and the Offshore Oil and Gas guidelines help serve this purpose. Use of resources requires investment in infrastructure, which should take into account the principles of sustainability and the social needs of local communities.

Climate change and its effects in the Arctic

According to an overwhelming majority of scientists, and from long-term observations by local people, climate change is taking place with strong, variable and largely unpredictable effects on nature and communities in the Arctic. The biggest temperature increases are expected to occur in the Arctic. Climate change may lead to the acceleration of stratospheric ozone depletion in the region. Changes in ocean currents are possible and carry the risk of severe effects on living conditions in some parts of the Arctic. Thawing permafrost poses dangers to communities and industries in many parts of the Arctic and could, with increasing emissions of greenhouse gases, accelerate climate change. There is a risk of a vicious circle with a large global impact. Actions aimed at decelerating human contributions to climate change — addressing emissions of greenhouse gases, for example — may help Arctic residents better adjust to coming changes.

The Arctic Council has launched an ambitious project to assess the environmental, social and economic consequences of climate variability and change and the effects of increased ultraviolet radiation in the Arctic, the results of which will in due course be placed at the disposal of the international community.

The Arctic as a sink for pollutants

The Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, adopted in 1991 and continued under the Arctic Council, highlighted the risks posed to human health and wildlife by persistent organic pollutants and heavy metals. The Arctic serves as a basin for global pollution, transported via mainly atmospheric and riverine pathways and by sea currents from sources located far away from the region. The international Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and earlier regional protocols on persistent organic pollutants and heavy metals are of utmost importance to the region. Arctic countries intend to support developing countries and countries with economies in transition in their efforts to eliminate or reduce production and/or use of persistent organic pollutants and reduce the harmful effects of heavy metals on nature and human health.

Radioactivity — a threat to the Arctic

Long-lived radio nuclides from emissions of radioactivity in the past, in and outside the Arctic region, can still be measured in the Arctic. Of great concern are the potential consequences of accidents in nuclear power plants, the handling and storage of nuclear weapons, the decommissioning of nuclear submarines and the

disposal of spent nuclear fuel and other radioactive waste from submarines and vessels. A nuclear accident would have particularly severe consequences in the Arctic because of the vulnerability of the food chains to radioactive contamination. Protection of the Arctic environment requires rigorous adherence by all States to relevant international conventions and guidance on radiation protection, nuclear safety, radioactive waste management and emergency preparedness and their response in order to minimize the probability and consequences of accidents.

Conservation as a global and local interest

The Arctic is a distinct and significant component of the diversity of life on Earth. While much of the Arctic remains in a natural state, its nature and wildlife are increasingly facing various threats caused by human beings. Some of these damaging impacts stem from local activities, such as disturbance, loss and fragmentation of habitats resulting from oil, gas and hydropower development, road building and other infrastructure projects, tourism, unsustainable management of natural resources as well as overexploitation of living resources. Other impacts arise from global problems such as climate change and long-range pollution.

The Arctic Council contributes to conservation of nature and biological diversity through its Strategic Plan for the Conservation of Arctic Biological Diversity, in line with the objectives of the International Convention on Biological Diversity (Rio de Janeiro 1992). On the basis of the overview report "Arctic Flora and Fauna; Status and Conservation", the Arctic Council will prepare recommendations for cooperative and collaborative conservation measures. In these efforts it is particularly important to bear in mind the concerns of the many indigenous and local communities that remain linked to their lands, waters and wildlife.

Viable communities in the Arctic

Arctic communities and cultures remain vital and resilient, despite tremendous social, demographic and technological changes during the last century. Many Arctic populations are still very dependent on traditional sources of livelihood. With technological advances, some traditional ways of using the environment and its renewable resources for subsistence have become economically less viable. New economic activities are urgently needed to support a population big enough to keep communities viable and enhance quality of life in the Arctic.

Capacity-building, including through cooperation among educational institutions in the Arctic, can contribute to the viability of Arctic communities. Traditional knowledge should be used in capacity-building. Use of advanced information technology can mitigate problems related to long distances. Tourism complements traditional occupations but also calls for attention to environmental impacts, navigation safety and emergency preparedness as it expands to new areas.

Arctic indigenous communities cannot take the availability of health services for granted, especially not in their native language. The harmful effects of pollutants on food safety, the spread of infectious diseases and drug abuse pose threats to public health. In some parts of the Arctic the life expectancy of people in indigenous communities is alarmingly low. The Arctic Council will contribute to the improvement of human health in the Arctic.

Investments in human resources assure a better future for children and youth in the Arctic. More recognition should be given to the vital contribution made by women to their communities.

The fate of the Arctic is largely dependent on progress in global efforts to adjust human economic activities to the capacity of nature. Global action, with the circumpolar North as an active partner, is essential for the future of the Arctic.